

Anabaptist History - Part 2

by Walter Beachy

Walter Beachy's sermon explores the historical roots and significance of the Anabaptist movement within the context of the Reformation.

Duration: 1:16:59

Scripture: Acts 2:38, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Anabaptist History"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the tradition of Amish singing and compares it to the beauty of four-part harmony. He mentions a specific song called 'Das Lob Lied' that was sung in the Amish Church, taking 20 minutes to sing four verses. The speaker then introduces an outline and timeline of history that he will make available to the audience. He emphasizes the importance of knowing where we came from and why, in order to know where we are going as Mennonites.

Transcript

The beautiful singing of four-part harmony compared to the Amish singing, and this is not to disparage them, the tradition of the Amish tunes and the words of their songs is a rich tradition. But we sang the same song in the Amish church for the second song every time we met. Das Lob Lied, does that ring a bell? The praise song.

Lied is song, Lob is praise. Das Lob Lied, we would sing that and it actually took twenty minutes to sing four verses. And there were several men who, when they started it with the O Gott Vater, they'd sing the O. Every first syllable of every line was lined by whoever was leading the song.

And there were several men who wanted to slow it down, the slower the holier, I guess. But in any case, we boys would sometimes talk about whether we could have run around the house two or three times until they got the O sung, and everybody could join in singing Gott Vater, wir loben dich, and all that, you know, the German. It's a beautiful prayer, by the way.

But every Sunday, twenty minutes for the same song, or every two Sundays when we met. And I was sitting there at United Bethel just feeling like I already had one foot in heaven. And another thing that began to happen soon after that is I happened to notice they had an outstanding young woman in the youth class, the youth girls do.

But I thought she would never look at me because I had promised my father that if he would let me go to United Bethel, that as long as I'm under age twenty-one and at home, I will dress like he wants me to dress, and I will cut my hair like he wants me to cut it. And at that point, I was parting my hair in the middle. That was the only way of doing it.

I parted my hair in the middle, and I had them, Dad said I could have them tapered just a little, you know, but I had lots of hair. When other young guys in the youth group had crew cuts, all that nice kind of stuff, especially in the summer, they talked about how cool they were. Well, later when long hair was in, we had really cold summers because they had this long hair then.

I was just ahead of my time as an Amish Mennonite in the Mennonite church. But anyway, I had these grandiose dreams about what the Mennonite church is. And then it got shattered one day.

We were kneeling to pray, which by the way, we don't do enough anymore. Amen? It's kind of weak. But anyway, you are Mennonites.

So, we were kneeling to pray, and I kept hearing, it was a whole row of us boys, and I kept hearing on the other end some whispering and giggling. And finally, I decided to do a biblical thing. It does say watch and pray, doesn't it? So, I just looked down the row, and here were two of the guys, baptized members of the church, kneeling, and they had pictures of girls, just pictures from high school, I think.

There was nothing wrong with the pictures. But they obviously weren't praying. They were looking at these pictures, maybe teasing each other about them, I don't know.

But they were looking at these pictures and talking and giggling. And I just couldn't believe that that would happen. Just couldn't believe it.

And at the same time, for the first two years that I was going to United Bethel, there were quite a few times that a small church in downtown Columbus, an independent Baptist church, with a very good preacher, and they had a lot of special programs where they'd get speakers in that were really good speakers, and just special programs that a lot of people from United Bethel would attend. And so I began to attend some too. Sometimes even with Mary Jane's folks.

And anyway, I went to this church called Souls Harbor. Good name. Nice name for a church.

And I was enthralled by organ music. Now that's really old hat now. Not many churches use organs, but they had an organ.

And in my little Amish brain at that point, this was heavenly music. Plus good preaching, good programs. And there was a time when I began to think, maybe I should join the Baptists.

In fact, I had a first cousin who did. Died just a few years ago, and he was a Baptist, independent Baptist preacher for many years. And he was a good man, a good brother.

I don't doubt his salvation. He was a notch older than I. But he joined the Souls Harbor Church. Later was ordained to the ministry, and so on.

And I was tempted to do that. But here's the point I want to make with you. Suddenly it began to dawn on me.

See, this would be about 1952 now. About two years after I was saved. And the Korean War was waging at that time.

It was called a police action, but it was a war. And I knew that the Baptists were not non-resistant. And I had read The Martyr's Mirror over the course of two winters.

I had read through The Martyr's Mirror. How many of you have read The Martyr's Mirror? It's about that thick. How many have read it? We've got one hand here.

Two, three, four. Wonderful. That's a higher percentage than in most churches where I ask for a raised hand.

Because people look at this big thick book and decide, no way. You'd never get finished. But in any case, that reading of The Martyr's Mirror gave me an introduction to our roots that when I thought about leaving the Mennonites and becoming a Baptist, I just couldn't do it.

And during the time of the Korean War then, after I had given up the idea of becoming a Baptist, I didn't personally hear it, but I saw it printed, and people had heard it. An evangelical radio preacher had said, if I were president, I would cure this problem, or solve this problem, of yellow-bellied COs, conscientious objectors, Mennonites and others, brethren and so on. He said, I'd solve that problem once and for all.

And this was during the... No, this had been done during the war with Japan. He was a West Coast preacher, so it happened in the 40s, the mid-40s before the war ended. He said, I would take these COs on a ship and take them halfway over to the Philippines, where they were fighting the Japanese, and halfway over I would give them a rifle and I'd tell them to go along and fight or walk home.

Half the Pacific walking on the water is a long walk. And he was an evangelical, Bible-believing preacher. And I just thought to myself, I cannot go there.

I personally believe that a lot of people have left Mennonite circles. Between the Civil War and the 20th century, and now again in my generation, they've left because they've had disappointments in Mennonite preachers, Mennonite churches, for we've not really understood who we are historically. And Mennonites are not blessed with holier births than other people, right? Our children are born depraved because Mom and Dad are depraved, right? And Grandpa and Grandma were depraved, and so on all the way back.

But we really, in many cases, don't know who we are. I'd like to try, at least this week, to help you, if you don't already know, help you know who we are historically. But to do that, we also have to look at how we got to the 16th century.

We don't understand what happened in the 16th century when our movement was aborning unless we know what happened before. What made the situation that the Reformation happened in? And right off the start, I want to get rid of one misconception that I run into a good bit. You can ask a lot of people, young people and some not so young, that you can ask them the question, who is the oldest, the Lutherans and the Reformed or the Anabaptists? And they won't know except that they just assume, well, the Lutherans and the Reformed are much older.

We actually came out of the same movement. We started our first church in Europe about three years after the Reformed movement began, and about four and a half years after the Lutheran movement began. But we are essentially the third wing of that Reformation movement, the first wing being Lutheran

and the second wing being Reformed, the third wing being the Anabaptist movement.

But we came out of the same crucible, out of the same churches, our church, the Catholic Church. That's where we came out of. And we need to know why we left.

Or we need also to know why didn't our forefathers settle for being Lutheran or Reformed? Why didn't they just settle for that? Because we do owe Luther a debt. He did some things right. We owe Zwingli, who started the Reformed movement, and, well, who headed it up.

He didn't really start it, but that's too long a story to go into. But he headed it up until he died on the battlefield outside of Zurich. And then Calvin became the principal leader of the Reformed movement.

We know him better than Zwingli. But in any case, why didn't our forefathers decide that Zwingli and Calvin had made enough change in the movement of the Catholic Church or the Universal Church. That's what that word Catholic means.

Why didn't they settle for that? What made them go the third wing, especially when it cost them 3,000 to 4,000 lives in about the first 50 years, and a lot of confiscated property and a lot of prison terms and harassment and things like that. Well, I have an outline that we'll make available. I'm not sure who the usher is who's going to be passing those out, or the ushers.

Let's pass them out at least one per couple and then one for single adults and so on. Or any young adult who looks intelligent. You all do.

But in any case, let's pass those out, and I'll take just a few moments to introduce them very briefly so that you can maybe use them after I'm long gone and get some help from them. And then we'll want to go right to the timeline of history that I have there in what would look like your second inside page. As you get these now, just open up that cover page there thing that doesn't map anything much.

But everything has to have a cover, you know. Then you have a very brief outline on the inside cover there of Anabaptist history and theology. I've done a very brief outline and then I've given you a short, and this is a very short, bibliography.

The Anabaptist story, I think, is the best short, readable account of Anabaptist history, and it's not written by an Anabaptist. But he was very intrigued by us and very interested in our story. He reminds me, in reading about Estep, reminds me a bit about like one Lutheran seminarian that I met at the Columbus City Mission one time.

When I had gone down, actually our church is still going there once a month, and did so in 1950 when I first joined the church. So we've been going to the City Mission for at least 60 years and probably a bit longer than that. But anyway, one night as we were preparing the supper before the service was to begin, this one young man that was there helping said, he is from the Lutheran seminary and he's actually doing some seminary practicum work by helping there at the mission.

Excuse me just a minute. When I move to the side, am I still coming through okay? Because it sounds like less volume to me personally. Okay, just want to make sure that you're, if anyone can't hear, go like this and I'll see if I can catch you at least and make sure that everyone can hear.

But anyway, this seminarian said to me, he said, Pastor Beachy, do your people know who you are? And I said, well yeah, I think so because I teach our history at the Bible Institute and so I also preach it a good bit and so whether they like it or not, they know who we are. And he said, well, I was studying history this last, church history this last semester and the prof gave you guys a half period and wrote you off like a bunch of crackpots and I read your stuff and I was enamored by it. He said, you guys had it together back there much better than Luther did.

I said, tell me about it, I agree. And he said, a lot of Lutherans in America would agree more with Menno Simons than they would with Martin Luther. I said, that's probably true on some things but not on others.

He said, if I had your history, and this is his words verbatim, I would shout it from the housetops. I said, come and join us and start shouting. We need a few shouters.

He said, you don't know my wife. I said, so what's about your wife? Well, he said, I backslid. I was raised Catholic.

I backslid and quartered a backslidden Catholic and we married backslidden and then when we had a couple children, we decided we ought to go back to the church. So he said, we went first to her church. He said, we got out of the church and got in the car and I, before I started the car, I looked over at her and I said, no way, I'm never coming back here.

So she went with him to the Baptist church the next Sunday and when they got out to the car, before he could start the car, she looked at him and said, no way, I'm never coming back here. I said, why did she say that? Well, he said, the sermon was dry, the young people were irreverent and it just wasn't reverent and she was raised that in church you don't make noise, you know. Very irreverent.

I've been to Catholic Mass numbers of times. I wasn't planning to convert there, get that right. I was learning.

But anyway, he said, we decided if we can't join the Catholics or the Baptists, then we'll join the Lutherans. We compromised. I said, she won that argument, didn't she? Yeah, he said, she did.

Because I said, you Lutherans now are about three-fourths Catholic. Yeah, he said, I know. But I'm not.

And I plan to be a Lutheran pastor. And I said, bless your heart, see what you can do to bring some new life there. I've got a lot of Lutheran neighbors, nice people in many cases, but in far too many cases, not really born again Christians.

But we have enough problems as Mennonites, I don't have to decry Lutherans. But we need to know who we are. Now, this particular list in the bibliography, and there's where I digress, I'm not going to go over that except just to make one comment about *The Secret of Their Strength* by Hoover.

His experience was very different from my own. And I would not be as negative about American Mennonitism as he tends to be. And I would highly recommend, even though he's difficult to read, that if you want a good grasp both of the life and the issues, the life of our Anabaptist forefathers and the issues in the 16th century, the Reformers and their stepchildren is probably the best of that kind of information that you will find.

And then, of course, the complete writings of Menno Simons and the Martyrs' Mirror as well as the Mennonite Encyclopedia. Now, let's go to this timeline. And since we're not using an overhead, we'll just have it in front of you.

And I'll want to kind of take it by segments, but let's first just identify the different eras of church history. Now, remember I said this morning, this late in history, it's terribly hard to be original. But I would agree with those, that high majority of church history students, historians, who would use this particular breakdown of the different eras of church history.

Meaning that from Pentecost, starting at the front there, I think because of the multiple copies we've made of this, that we lost our first line there. But most of you know, do you not, what year did Pentecost happen? The crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension, and then Pentecost. Which year was it? Do you remember? So you don't remember? Well, you weren't there, I know that.

But it was the year 33 A.D. 33 A.D. So you might want to write that in there. And that would be a line at the beginning, 33 A.D. And that first era goes to 313, 280 years. But it actually has a transition from 311 to 325.

But most will use 313 as the dividing line between what is called the Ante, A-N-T-E, Ante-Nicene Era, which means before Nicaea, the Nicene Creed. Or some simply write it, or name it, the Early Christian Era. And then from 313 to about 1096, when the first of the Crusades happened.

And we'll come back to that. But between those two breaks, those two years, 783 years, in that nearly eight centuries, is the Medieval Era, or often just called the Middle Ages, and sometimes called the Dark Ages. And the Dark Ages is not a bad term for it, really.

Then you have about 200 years, just five years shy, of what is called the Crusades, or 200 years of war between the Muslim East and the Christian West. And very frankly, a lot of what's happening in the world today is a revival of that tension between Muslim and Christian West. And the West is no more Christian, if as Christian, as it was then.

But it wasn't very Christian then, either. Only God knows what percentage of people in the Western world at that time were actually born-again Christians. But it was a small percentage, I'm sure.

It's a small percentage now. And yet Muslims today look over at the West and they consider us mostly Christian. I spoke for two hours last November in Sudan, through a translator.

I spoke with a very devout Muslim who said to me a number of things. Well, let me summarize. He would have had the idea that Westerners are Christian, but they are also militaristic.

He asked why we are. And we are worldly and arrogant and immoral. They have exposure to Western television and Western news.

And so they know some of what's going on among us. And they think, he's saying, how can people who are Christian be like that? I said, well, most of them aren't Christian. Plus, he had made the statement that he has never read anyone's teachings that compared to the teachings of Jesus, which means he had read the Gospels.

He was on a quest for truth. A Muslim, a devout Muslim. But he wanted to know about Jesus.

And when my friend introduced me to him on the street and told him that I was one of his teachers at a Bible college in America, he said, oh, I'd love to talk to him. He got all excited talking to Yasser, my friend. And then Yasser said, he would like to sit down and talk with you about Jesus.

And I said, let's do it. And my hands itched to baptize him. But anyway, he is on a quest for truth.

That concept we have of them and the concept they have of us is what's leading to all the friction. And Michael Sattler, actually one of his accusations that they used to condemn him to death an Anabaptist martyr I'll talk about later this week. He said that the Muslims aren't as guilty before God.

This is a paraphrase of what he said. They aren't as guilty before God as the Christians because at least their, quotes, holy writings condone the use of force. And the Quran does use, does give, how would you say, approval for the use of force.

You're supposed to try as a Muslim to convert infidels. That's anyone who isn't Muslim. To them we are all infidels here tonight.

And they should try to convert us, but if they can't, then it is proper to put us to death. And he said, Sattler said, Jesus said we should not use the sword. We should suffer wrong rather than use violence or force.

And their holy rite, the holy writ says, you can use force. But they construed it against him and messed it up and didn't present it rightly. But I digress now.

We're at the end of the first big break following the medieval era, 1096. There were ten major crusades. We'll talk about just briefly.

And then at the end of those crusades, you have what is called an era of rebirth. That word renaissance is a French word for rebirth. Re is a prefix in French just like in English, except they say re.

And renaissance. You've got to talk through your nose if you try to speak French. But anyway, renaissance is rebirth.

This was a time of rebirth in the Western world. And it was a time of improvement for the Western world's people. More and more people got to be literate, could read and write and so on.

And the standard of living increased somewhat. And they weren't fighting the Muslims anymore on a regular basis, although they actually did fight over in what is now Istanbul or Constantinople then as late as 1456. And that's when Constantinople fell to the Muslims.

Then you have in 1517, the beginning of the Reformation. And it's usually dated to end at 1650, which is a time that is called the Peace of Westphalia. Westphalia is a town in Germany.

There's also a town in southern Indiana that's called Westphalia. But in Westphalia, Germany, some of the Catholics and Lutherans and Reformed got together and decided they're going to stop pestering each other. If Reformed lived in a Catholic area, they would give them a hard way to go.

Well, they decided to quit doing that. They finally decided to let people be what they wanted to be without pressure from the government or the church through the government, that sort of thing. That's why that's considered the end of the Reformation era.

Now, if you go from 1650 to 2000, just for round figures sake, ten years ago, and once you get to be my age, ten years is only about five anymore. But if you go to 2000, as I said, you only have 350 years. And that's just a little more than that first era of the early Christian era.

See how small a segment you'd have to add to this to bring us right up to 2010. It would just be off the page about the width that's left on your page, and you would be right to 2010. Now, I'm of the opinion that you really will not understand what happened in the 16th century.

You won't appreciate it. And some of the issues are still issues today, unless you know what happened before, at least in a skeletal sort of way. Yogi Berra, who used to play baseball for the New York Giants, I think it was Giants, but I don't know, the New York baseball team.

Was it the Giants? Yankees, that's right. I didn't think Giants sounded right. Are the Giants even a baseball team? No.

Well, anyway, they must be football if they're Giants. Okay. The New York Yankees, he used to play for them.

He was an Italian who never quite mastered our language. And he had what they called yogi-isms. Like one of them was, if you come to a fork in the road, don't take it.

Which leaves you kind of hanging. And he said one time to young people, he was trying to inspire them to set goals and let their lives be governed by their goals and not just pushed around by their whims and their friends. He said, if you don't know where you're going, you're going to wind up somewhere else.

And that kind of leaves you hanging. And yet it makes a statement. In fact, they laughed, and later he had told his handlers he doesn't want to use it again.

They said, that's one of your best. Use it. So he did.

He would tell young people in schools and so on, if you don't know where you're going, you're going to wind up somewhere else. Well, that can be applied to any denomination probably, but to us as Mennonites. And I would add a statement that if we don't know where we came from and why, then we probably won't know where we're going.

And we may not even care where we're going. If we just don't know how we got to where we are today. So let's go back and put that together, hopefully yet before we run out of time, which we started ten minutes late, didn't we? Now we'll stop at 7.30 or very soon thereafter, okay? I want to keep my wife happy and that will help.

In that first era, there are many things that are said and written about the early church. And I don't know if any of you have read Bersow's book. His name looks like Burcott.

I think it's Italian or French. Bersow. B-E-R-C-E-O-T.

C-O-T, I mean. Bersow wrote a book. He's written several.

But the one I refer to now is *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up?* And the premise of his book is that if the early church fathers, leaders, could come back to life in 20th century America, he wrote it in the last century, they would, and it would attend evangelical churches, they would consider us heretical,

evangelical churches. Now Mennonites are evangelical, though. I want you to understand something about that.

I've heard people say, Mennonites are not evangelical. Well, I hope we are. Because evangelical is a word used to denote persons, groups of people, a church who is not sacramental.

The Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Greek Orthodox, and several others besides that, they are what we call sacramental churches. Where like in Catholic dogma, I've read most of their dogma, the Catholic dogma would say that a priest, a duly ordained priest, that means he's ordained under the umbrella of the papacy, a duly ordained priest has the authority under God to convey the grace of God to man through the sacraments. Which means that if I'm a duly ordained priest, I can baptize your baby and that makes that baby Christian.

And I can take bread and wine and do the right things, the right ceremony in the ceremony of the Mass. And when I lift the chalice and say this is my body, at that moment, it becomes the body and blood of the Lord. Transubstantiation.

And then I can give you the wafer, and they used to put a little grape juice in it, they still do, but some now are offering the cup as well, but they used to for many years just offer the wafer and it had a little wine in it in the recipe. But in any case, when they give communion, they will take the wafer out, they used to lay it on the tongue, and for everybody that came, they would say, brother or sister, the body of Jesus, the body and blood of Jesus. And take the next wafer, brothers, the body and blood of Jesus.

They really believe that that is the way the grace of God is transmitted to man. That's why Catholics are so reluctant to leave their church because they have been assured that this is apostolic, goes way back to Peter, and they are going to make it to heaven even if they don't live a good life. And a good Catholic priest will urge his people to live a good life.

I've heard some pretty decent homilies by Catholic priests. A homily is a short sermon, not a lamb calf. But for you Pennsylvania Dutch speakers, homily is calf.

But anyway, a homily is a short sermon. They last about 10 to 15 minutes. And I've heard some pretty good homilies by Catholic priests.

They would not urge you to live badly, but if you do, you can still make it to heaven because you've been baptized. And if you don't have enough merit, and this is their word, if you don't have enough merit to make it to heaven when you die, then you go to the temporary place of suffering called purgatory. You see the word purge there? A place of purging? And they say, theologically they're right, they say nothing avails for sin but the blood of Jesus.

However, you can make satisfaction for your sins in purgatory. Or you can do it before by good deeds. And in the time of the Reformation, they were actually selling indulgences so that you could pay for your sins before you committed them.

So that you wouldn't be at risk of going to purgatory. That kind of thing. Now they've quit doing that, to their credit, but they did do it back then.

That's the sacramental versus evangelical. Evangelicals believe in salvation by grace through faith. Menno Simons often referred to his own beliefs and his followers as evangelical Christians.

We are because we believe in salvation by grace through faith. But we have some very definite differences with some other evangelicals. But don't let anyone tell you we aren't evangelical, unless of course we aren't.

And there probably are churches now in our Mennonite family that couldn't really be called evangelical. Now, in spite of all that you might say about the early church, depending on which funnel you read them through. And I say this not to do any bragging or for impression's sake.

I'm too old to need an ego boost. And my wife is very good at that. She keeps me feeling good about who I am.

But I have read all of the Antonicene Fathers that have been translated to English. It's a list of books about that wide on my shelf at home. And I found it very interesting.

My wife looked over my shoulder a few times when I was reading some of those bigger books with small print. And she'd just shake her head. But it was an exposure to the thinking of the people back here.

Let me summarize by saying no one can argue with this. Bersow doesn't agree with everything I would say about those early fathers. It depends on who you're reading and in what era, because there was change and difference among them.

But Bersow would agree with me that they definitely believed in a believer's church. They did not believe in a state church. They did not believe in infant baptism.

They believed in believer's baptism. So you'd have a believer's church. And consequently, they also had church discipline.

They also believed in the two kingdom concept. That there are those in the world, the majority, who are in the kingdoms of this world or the kingdom of this world or Satan's kingdom. And then the minority, which is in the kingdom of God, in the church.

The two kingdom concept. To this day, that is a fuzzy one in even a lot of evangelical circles. Two kingdoms.

Very, very fuzzy. Uncertain. I had a Baptist preacher, a former Baptist preacher, who was part of a small evangelical Mennonite family, a church family, email me after I was there for meetings.

And he wanted help with perceiving, understanding the two kingdom concept. Part of that is because of the God and country thing that is so strong among Baptists, really. And you have a fuzzy two kingdom concept there.

One of the television and radio preachers from Columbus, Ohio, who is, again, my generation. I heard him one time after the first desert storm war under the first President Bush. Now about what, 14 years ago? No, it's more than that.

It was 91. So that's 19 years ago. See, that's how fast time goes.

It seems like less than 14, but it's 19. It was in 91. But I heard him one time when I was up somewhere preaching and on the way home, I was just dialing around to find something to keep me awake.

And he tends to keep me awake because he disgusts me at times. And he was telling how wonderful these soldiers were that went over there and got this great victory for America. And I forget how many had died.

But he preached them all straight to heaven and said nothing about whether or not they were really Christian. And I do believe there are misguided Christians in the Army. Did you hear me? I think they're misguided.

But I think there are Christians in the Army. I wouldn't write them off just because they are in the Army. But in any case, that two kingdom concept is not that clear in many circles today.

They were a persecuted minority At times it was worse than at other times. And sometimes in one province of Rome it was worse than in another. But for the most part, they had a lot of persecution in that first era.

They had the worst persecution from 295 to 311. For those 16 years, 17, there was an emperor by the name of Diocletian who saw the decline of the Roman Empire as being due to the fact that they allowed the infidels among them to exist. And the infidels were the Jews and the Christians because they didn't believe in the gods of the Romans, which was really the gods of the Greeks.

They were into the Greek mystery religions. And they had 365 gods plus the unknown god. Remember that account in the book of Acts? And there's a long story there I'd love to tell you, but I just don't have time.

It would take about 15 minutes to do that one, any justice at all. But they had reason to believe that there is an unknown god. And Paul said, I want to introduce you to him, or him to you, vice versa.

And he did that on Mars Hill. Back there in that first Christian era. But because the Christians and Jews would not accept those gods, and the fact that the government or the Caesars were supposedly demigods, meaning they were the offspring of either a goddess and a man or a god and a woman, which is a big farce.

But the idea of incarnation, meaning God becoming a man, goes way back in history. And many civilizations, oral tradition, talk about the promise of God visiting man in his own nature. The idea of an incarnation.

And it probably originated from the promise in Genesis 3.15. I will put enmity between you and the woman, speaking to Satan, between your seed and his seed, and it will crush your head and you will bruise his heel. They understood something about a promise for the seed of the woman to be the redeemer of man. And the idea of incarnation, the unfleshed God becoming real in the flesh.

That's Jesus. Well, anyway, that kind of thing was understood in that era, and they were a persecuted minority because of their beliefs and their rejection of the Roman gods. And then, lastly, nonresistance.

And here I keep running into this when I share this, and I've done it now for probably right at 40 years, in many, many contexts, including some non-Mennonite contexts, where I've said, you show me one exception to the rule that there is no known case of anyone in the first Christian era up to the time of Constantine that there was anyone who was a soldier and a member of the church for any length of time. Now, surely, if someone became a soldier after they were baptized members of the church, they wouldn't

have just excommunicated in that very moment. But they never did approve of or tolerate having their members be members of the army.

And they were not drafted. The Romans hired their soldiers. And they hired a lot of Germans back then.

Did you know that? I just get the warm fuzzies when I think about it. In extra-biblical history, we're told that in the Christian era, even in the time of Christ, the Romans hired a lot of Germans because they were known to be the best fighters. So we're pretty scrappy.

And they would put their best soldiers in the areas where they had the most trouble with the people. And the place they had the most trouble at that early era was Israel, Palestine. So the soldiers, at least the officers of the occupation forces in Israel during the time of Christ, were very, very probably Germans.

And remember that story where the centurion? See, he would have been out there, and his men, out there watching the crowds when Jesus drew these big crowds in the second year of his ministry. There were these thousands of people following him, and the Romans watched them carefully. And they would have dispersed the crowd if anything political would have come up.

Jesus avoided that. But one day this centurion came and said, Master, I have a request. And the fact that he addressed him as Master when he was a centurion is already saying something.

And then he said, I have a servant at home that's sick. Very sick. This is Reader's Digest version now.

He's very sick, but I am not worthy that you would come to my house to pray for him. Just speak the word, and he'll be okay. And Jesus turned to the Jews and his disciples, the crowd, and his disciples, and insulted them terribly.

Because they hated the Romans. You know what he said? I have not seen faith like that in Israel. I can just imagine Peter saying, hmm, you know.

That was an insult. And that was Grandpa Beachy. Now that's where I get the warm fuzzies.

Because my grandparents were living back then. Did you know that? You have lineage all the way back there, or you're not here. Unless you were found under a cabbage head somewhere one day.

But you weren't. You have grandparents going all the way back there. Well, let's move on to what happened then.

In that early era, they did begin to backslide. After all, it was nearly 300 years. That's longer than Mennonites have been in America.

Did you know that? Well, it's about the same time as when the first ones came to Germantown. But many of our forebears came over in the 1790s to the 1840s. In that half century, where most of our people came.

In that 280 years, they did, in some cases, digress a good bit from the early church. But they were still a believer's church, and they were still a persecuted minority. Then, when Diocletian put the screws on them for about 16 years, and then he died, the Christian church was in a bad way.

They were an underground church. They were persecuted. They were really browbeaten.

They had begun to build churches in the era just prior to that, when there wasn't much persecution. And those were either, if they were good enough buildings, the government took them over. If they weren't really good, they destroyed the buildings, burned them out or destroyed them.

So the church was an underground church and in a bad way. And then in 315, pardon me, 311, Diocletian died. And the Romans had two young, aspiring men, who were first cousins, in fact.

Constantine and a cousin of his, whose name I can't recall. But he didn't live, so it didn't matter. These two men were aspiring to be the next emperor of Rome.

And both men had senators, which was the governing body under the emperor. They had senators behind them and they had military men behind them. And so when they couldn't come together on a decision as to who should be the next emperor, they solved it rather than having a recount like we did when George Bush was first elected in Florida.

Instead of having multiple recounts, they said, okay, let's have a battle between the armies of the two emperors. The military people that are behind one emperor, aspiring emperor, and the other one. So it was Constantine against his cousin.

Now they were to fight each other, yeah, but primarily to fight each other to get to the emperor. The emperor had to be in a well-marked carriage or chariot, so that they would know where he's at. So they agreed to this and they met on the two slopes of a little creek, a river called, well there was a bridge there called the Milvan Bridge.

It's called the Battle of the Milvan Bridge. It was fought in 311 between the forces of Constantine and his cousin. And the night before the battle, Constantine went out to pray to the gods.

He was a Roman. And he went out to pray to the gods as the sun was setting. And he said, this is his writing of it, or this is what is thought to be his writing, his account of it.

He said, as I was praying to the gods, I suddenly saw emblazoned on the setting sun the sign of the Nazarene. The Nazarene referring to Jesus. Not Nazarite now, that's different.

Nazarene. And that was the cross. He saw a cross.

And he said, I heard these words. In this sign conquer. And he went running back to his command tent and told his generals, the Nazarene is also a god.

I just had a mysterion. That's what they called it in the Latin language. A mysterion.

Which is translated by the Catholics into Latin. For church use. Well, it was in the Old Roman, which was a Latin dialect, yes.

They translated it sacrament later. But in any case, he said, one of the gods spoke to me and it was the Nazarene. So what he did, they mixed up, they had lime apparently, they mixed up what you'd call a whitewash.

And he ordered his soldiers, of course they sent the word out to all the soldiers, who were kind of discouraged because his cousin had more chariots. They were the tanks of that day and the armored personnel carriers. And slightly more soldiers.

So it looked like Constantine was the loser. But they spread the word that one of the gods spoke to him. But the shock was, it was the Nazarene.

Now there would have been soldiers and centurions, officers, who would have persecuted and killed Christians. And now they get the order from their leader, supposed next emperor, to paint crosses on their shields and on their chariots. Can you imagine guys painting crosses on their chariots and their shields who had killed Christians just a few years before? And some of them probably said, what is going on here? But they went into battle the next morning when the trumpet blew and that was a signal to go after each other's emperor.

They went into battle with that new courage because we're on the side of the gods. And sure enough, they got to his cousin before his cousin's soldiers got to Constantine. And they were being watched very closely and as soon as they got to his cousin and killed him, the trumpets blew and the battle was over and everybody got behind the new emperor, Constantine.

And the first thing he did was to send an edict throughout all of Rome. They had runners and like the stagecoaches and stuff like that that we had in the west much later. They had that sort of thing already and they could send word throughout the empire in a matter of a week.

And they got the word out to everyone, to all the governors that they should stop persecuting Christians. Then two years later in 313, he made another edict and said that every good Roman should become a Christian like he has. Although he was not baptized.

In fact, he wasn't baptized until he was on his deathbed. But he urged everyone to become Christian and the bishops went along with it thinking, man, now we can have peace and everyone can become Christian. Augustine, whose name you see there in his death, the year of his death is 432.

Augustine wrote a little over a hundred years later that the two swords the church was given the night when Jesus was arrested, he said, how many swords have you? And they said, two. And they were the little short swords, that's the word for that. They weren't the fighting swords.

He said, it's enough. He wanted, I think, to make sure there weren't a lot of swords there. And he thought Peter when Peter used his.

But Augustine said, that's an allegory that the church when it came of age under Augustine, or Constantine, I'm sorry, could now bear the sword of steel and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And then he went on to say, if we can't persuade you by the word to become a Christian, we can compel you by the sword to become a Christian. That's what happened to the church there in 313.

Now if you look down below where I have Constantine then a little dotted line goes down, it introduced sacralism, sacramentalism, sacerdotalism, and militarism, or the use of force by Christians. Now let me explain those three words and then just very quickly get us at least to the Renaissance and then we'll pick up tomorrow night at the beginnings of our Anabaptist movement. But those four words, don't let the size of the words confuse you.

And you don't even, as far as I'm concerned, have to remember the words, but you ought to know the concepts. Sacralism is a state or official religion. Like, wouldn't it be nice if I ran for governor of Ohio and, oh, let me see who else, well, let's have Rex run for governor of Pennsylvania.

And with today's political mood we might be able to win. And then we would make an official executive order that if you want to live in Pennsylvania or Ohio you have to be a Mennonite. Wouldn't that be nice? You know how ludicrous that is.

But that's essentially what happened. In one generation or even less than a generation, if you weren't Christian by baptism, you were a second-rate citizen if you weren't persecuted even. And the first instance of Christians persecuting Christians who didn't go along with it happened as early as 316.

It's an amazing thing. That whole thing of an official religion that controls things. And the illustration I used about Ohio and Pennsylvania is essentially what happened.

And that's the kind of world that Western Europe became. And the Catholic Church, Catholic meaning universal, became the power politically and religiously and even economically, became the power, the greatest power of Europe and became very wealthy, very powerful. And Luther and others even before him, Hus and Wycliffe, they would have recognized the errors of all of that.

The Catholic Church kept building hierarchy until you see on your outline there that Pope Leo was their first pope in 440. Oh, I didn't go ahead with sacramentalism and sacerdotalism. Let me explain those.

They're probably self-explanatory there. Sacramentalism, as I mentioned even earlier, is that the sacraments actually convey grace. And you know, it grieves me to say it, and I don't say it with any kind of disparagement.

God knows my heart. But in my own roots among the Amish, they have returned to sacramentalism much more than you can imagine. They kind of believe that being baptized, some of them would almost say that makes you Christian.

And if you go to communion every six months, then after communion, everything's okay. After all, you had communion, you know, that kind of thing. They actually did when I was a boy, and some of them still do.

Others know better now. But they would have anointing with oil as last rites for people who were dying. They did not anoint for healing.

They anointed for dying. That's a Catholic last rites concept, to prepare people to die. Sacerdotalism, then, is the priesthood of the ministry.

And that is still believed by the Catholics, that you have to have a priest that stands between you and God and ministers the grace of God to you through the sacraments. And, of course, the use of force is, without question, something that happened there and did not happen before. I'm not even sure if I quite finished what I was going to say about nonresistance in the first Christian era there.

But I've made the statement many times in many places that there is not one known case of the Church putting up with soldiers in that first era, and no one has been able to show me an exception to that. And I heard a Catholic monk, a Jesuit priest monk, educator, who spoke at Ohio State University. I heard him say the very same thing.

He was a Catholic, but he was a committed pacifist. And I don't mean humanistic pacifist. He was, I think, a biblical pacifist.

And he said that the early Church was clearly pacifistic. And then Constantine came along, and we merged Church and State. And so you had to have a police force, and you do, to suppress evil.

And nations need armies to suppress evil. But that's not the business of the Church. And that's what our Anabaptist forefathers said.

And for a Catholic monk to say that in my lifetime was quite refreshing. You'll notice then, too, and I must close now, you'll notice that in 622 you have the rise of Islam, Mohammedanism. That's the date usually given for that.

And it swept over North Africa and up the eastern end of the Mediterranean, and finally ended at the straits there between Asia and Europe at Istanbul or Constantinople. And today now has, in my lifetime, had a regeneration and revival of jihad. And they really want to conquer the world.

Let me just say quickly in passing, I learned something since I've been going several times now to Sudan that I had no idea was part of Muslim belief. But I read it in the papers before I first went to Sudan, and then I began to ask questions about it. Remember the Iranian leader, Abamadinejad? I really have to think about his name.

Abamadinejad, yeah. He said that he wants to create a lot of havoc. He talks about wiping Israel off the face of the earth because he said the more problems, the more havoc there is in the civilization, the sooner we'll see the return of the Mahdi.

Mahdi is an Arabic term for the Redeemer or the Rescuer. M-A-H-D-I is the way they spell it. The Mahdi.

The return of the Mahdi. When I was talking to this Quranic, this devout Muslim about Jesus, I asked him at one point, I said, what do you believe about the return of the Mahdi? Is that Mohammed or Jesus? He said, I think it's Jesus. A Muslim who actually believes in the return of Jesus, and I know Mennonite preachers who don't.

Yeah, we've gotten there. They don't actually believe in the literal return of Christ. Well, the Ten Crusades I don't have time for, and just a few things then in the Renaissance, and we'll pick up there tomorrow night and get us right into the Reformation, the birth of our own movement back then.

I'd like to close each session with an opportunity for you to ask a question or two, and if you don't think of one now and you do later, then just write it down so you don't forget it. Well, you may be young enough, you won't forget it, but in any case, bring it along tomorrow night. But before I close, are there any questions, something I started saying and left hanging, or something I didn't address that you have a question about? If I know the answer, I'll try to answer it, and if I don't, I'll be honest and tell you I don't know.

Any questions, anyone that you'd like to ask? Yes. You'll have to keep your voice up because of that. That's a good question.

The question is basically this. Were there believers' churches, say like from Constantine all the way through to the time of the Reformation? And clearly there were. We have records of persecution by Catholics, of people who didn't go along with the Catholics.

In some cases we know little about them. But when I was in Europe for about three months doing some research back in 77, we stayed for a week in the guest quarters of the oldest continually existing Mennonite church in the world. They're in the Emmental in Switzerland.

And their retired pastor, whose second wife, his first wife had died, and he was in his late 80s, but had a fairly clear mind yet. But he spoke no English, but his second wife was fluent in English. So I made an appointment with them, and I conversed a lot with him in German.

But when things got a little technical and he used terms I didn't know, he was a very well-educated man, then I would have her translate so I understood what he was saying. And let me cut through a lot of things that probably went for about nearly two hours. But what he told me was that their church existed long before the Anabaptist movement was born in Zurich.

They joined the Anabaptist movement because they agreed with it. But he said, we have written records in the 1300s, no, the 13th century, the 1200s. They have written records of brothers from Langnau, Switzerland, that same village, to go to Greece and visit churches of like faith.

See, their common language would have been the Latin. All of the educated got their graduate-level education in Latin. So regardless of what the vernacular was in a given country, if a man was educated, he could speak with anyone in Europe in Latin.

So if they had just one brother who could speak Latin, then they could take several brothers and visit anywhere and do translation just like we do today when we don't know the language of the country we visit. And he said, we existed back in the 13th century, long before the Anabaptist movement. That was exciting for me to run into that.

He said, he didn't have quick access to the records, but he assured me that he's not mistaken on that. That he's read through their own records from their own church, and that's what they were existing back then. That was in the latter part of the Crusades era.

So surely that was true. God has always had his people. He's also had Christians even in the traditional Catholic church.

There were Christians there, no question about it. If you read some of the things about Francis of Assisi, I expect to meet Francis in heaven. I really do.

There are so many people I want to meet when I get there. But anyway, any other questions? I'll take one more and then we'll have to close. All right, with that, let's stand together.

I invite you back tomorrow night. Come praying, invite someone else if you can. And pray for me, that I may make best use of the time.

Father, we thank you for this time together. I thank you for each brother and sister, and young person and child here tonight. And we pray for each other that we would be found faithful in our generation.

Faithful to you and faithful to your word. And what it teaches us in doctrine and ethics. That we might put your word ahead of our feelings or thoughts, or even that which we can come up with or others can come up with in the intellect that you've given us.

So, Father, we pray your blessing and grace and benediction upon us in the precious name of Jesus.
Amen.

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